

Hey all -

Thanks for getting here, and for caring so much about our community. I want you to know that we have tried every avenue before getting here as a truly unplanned and unexpected last resort.

**TL;DR:**

- **damn I love this community**
- **we're facing some unprecedented times, for a million reasons, the most pressing of which is mismanagement and mishandling of various issues by our Board of Directors.**
- **I detail my experiences below, but you can find me on slack at @faith, my personal email is [fsavill@gmail.com](mailto:fsavill@gmail.com), and my number is (443) 380-0695 if you have any questions.**

When I came to MAGFest, I had many experiences coordinating volunteers, but I was really green as to how MAGFest worked. I can confidently say that I've never been a part of such a dope community. There is nothing you guys can't fucking do. This is truly the most innovative, smart, and fun group of folks I've had the privilege to work with. What is better than making fun events with your friends?

Of course, I know that MAGFest will still exist even if the current iteration of the Board isn't the same, or if the office has different employees. What I can say is that I've spent the last ten years working in non-profits - I've never been on a more cohesive and volunteer-focused team. Conversely, I've never worked with a board of directors who so greatly ignored their assigned duties (managing the ED and working to build fiscal responsibility, to name a couple) in favor of overreaching into employees' job duties and actively making volunteers' work more difficult or fraught.

If you've read the initial letter, you know that our concerns lie with the way in which the MAGFest BoD has been conducting themselves. I want to address a couple of those points with my own personal experiences:

Over the last year, the board has:

- **Not communicated any resolution to formal HR complaints made about the Executive Director by all 6 full-time employees**

See my account below (there's more but I tried to keep this to a couple pages). While the BoD has listened to these and my colleagues' issues, there has been no clear communication about steps forward, or steps taken to improve these issues.

- **Subverted existing HR procedures in order to retaliate against and discipline employees inappropriately**
  - See Deb's account.

- **Subverted existing internal procedures in order to retaliate against and discipline volunteers, including the staff-elected board nominees, inappropriately**

I was approached by BoD members on November 5 regarding a staffer's behavior. I agreed to meet (I was on vacation), even answering messages during my sister's wedding, because I was told it was urgent. During the meeting, the BoD members present asked if they could explain their plan before I reacted or asked questions, so I did. Their plan involved banning the staffer in question outright: revoking their admin access and banning them from staffing going forward. If you look at my [job description](#), the following are parts of my job:

- Handle reports against staff from volunteers
- Ban overtly problematic volunteers

The BoD, to their detriment, does not have written position descriptions. Rather than coming to me for my advice as Director of Volunteer Infrastructure, they formulated their own, rash plan. Admittedly, they did ask for what I thought after the fact, after they suggested firing a long-time, trusted volunteer with no written documentation of wrongdoing in the instances they mentioned.

- **Delayed and subsequently refused to add staff-elected board nominees to the board**

[Please see my emails to the BoD here.](#)

- **Refused to act on any attempts at feedback, honesty, and collaboration from employees, staff, and volunteers**

When I sent emails in July about the BoD's decision not to include Josiah and Shir, Jack called me to defend their decision. I expressed that they would avoid further issues if they created and shared a position description for a Board Member, explained what onboarding will look like, etc., and furthermore, held BoD Members accountable to those written expectations. As shared in [Shir](#) and [Josiah's](#) statements, this documentation was not created, and the nominees were not aware week-to-week of what the next "onboarding" expectations would be.

### **To elaborate a little more on some of my concerns:**

As a new person to MAGFest, I was grateful for folks' patience with me as I learned about the community and how we do things. Everyone in this community has been so helpful and welcoming, so I wanted to give our new ED the same patience and benefit of the doubt.

However, a few incidents threw up red flags for me:

In June, there was a post in a Slack channel from PB that was entirely well-intentioned about a staff survey regarding burnout and how we as a community could mitigate folks overworking themselves. A conversation followed, with staffers giving feedback challenging some of the

wording, what the survey would be used for, questions around wording, etc. Some comments were subjective, others objective. Not all comments were rooted in kindness - that I'll acknowledge (and I addressed these personally with those staffers). However, I caught my first glimpse here of inappropriate language from PB. I can't describe how frustrating this was. I reached out to PB privately, let him know he was out of line, and gave advice on how to move forward. I had staffers reach out to me to ask why I hadn't made a statement or commented in the thread. I chose to reach out to PB privately because I had just witnessed his reaction to public criticism. I was encouraged by our conversation and thought we'd move forward positively. Everyone makes mistakes, and everyone deserves multiple chances, especially as they are learning and adjusting (as I've mentioned, I've been given a few myself). I was promised I wouldn't be put in this situation again.

Not long after, realizing that my concerns were shared by my colleagues, we had a meeting with the entire office (including HR). We did some team-building activities and attempted to bring some of our concerns to PB. When confronted with these concerns, PB lashed out against other employees personally. Not only was this unkind and unexpected, it was honestly horrifying to watch as a bystander. If a supervisor has genuine issues (related to performance or interpersonal problems) with an employee, the appropriate path to solution is via HR. It is completely inappropriate to scold or yell at employees in front of their peers. Watching PB raise his voice at Debra and Dac was jarring, and I said aloud that this was a red flag for me. To be honest, I was sitting outside during this meeting, and I was glad I was wearing sunglasses so that no one saw me start to tear up. When I brought up this interaction during my mediation in August, PB's response was "Why would I apologize? I didn't have anything to apologize for."

As an employee, anywhere, I should not have to be concerned or anxious when I see that my boss has posted in a channel or a thread. I should not be nervous when I see "*Paul Birtel is typing...*" - but I am. I cannot predict how he will react to constructive feedback, and I am anxious, having seen his reactions in the past. I have been apologized to in multiple ways about many of my recorded issues. I do not want apologies. I want a boss who does not repeatedly put me in these situations.

### **Regarding Mediation:**

This may only resonate with folks who I've had in-depth conversations with, but I have played a part in several mediations and difficult conversations between staffers, or between staffers and employees (if you know, you know). I have always found those conversations valuable and respectful, though understandably challenging for all involved. Even when tensions or emotions were high, all parties have walked away with some issues resolved, and others to continue thinking about - such is the practice of building or repairing relationships.

I requested mediation with PB because I thought it was the next step in improving our working relationship (both with each other and for the sake of the office as a team). I wanted to continue to follow the appropriate processes as laid out by HR. Before I was able to bring up my concerns (as the person who requested the meeting), I was met by PB with a clearly written-out

statement about me being insubordinate. While I'm certainly not beyond reproach, in this instance I was put in a place where I had to defend my actions before I was able to bring up his. I found this to be a kind of a bizarre and tbh, unnecessary, power play. *I know* who my boss is. A good manager never needs to remind you they are the leader, they are your boss, they make the rules, etc. They just lead.

In my own mediation, I was characterized by PB as "kicking and screaming constantly" - because I spoke up on behalf of the staff nominees for the BoD.

### **So What?**

More than anything, MAGFest is about this community of volunteers who come together to make incredible shit happen. **It is my job to care about the volunteer experience.** While some of the BoD's recent actions may not affect your day-to-day work, they have been huge blockers for the employees and volunteers in leadership. This prevents you from getting the answers you need, takes time away from the meetings we owe you, and has created an environment where we are afraid to be straightforward and decisive in a time when that's exactly what you need from us.

I have never written this type of letter before, and believe me when I say I have taken every step possible to remedy these issues. I have documented every issue possible and sent it via the appropriate channels. I am not being impatient; I first brought up these issues in June. As much as anyone, I recognize that change takes time. Those who have served on the Safe Committee with me know that I have advocated for individuals' ability to change and our need to be understanding and patient with others in our community.

But - I write this to you on a day during which I had to turn off my camera during our morning stand-up meeting because I was crying as I watched my supervisor yet again address a colleague in an attacking way, only for him to apologize an hour later because he was out of line. This is not a sustainable environment - it's certainly not fair to the employees, and because my work is entirely about supporting our staff and volunteer community, it's unfair to you as well. I hope you'll take the time to read our letters and demand marked accountability from our leadership. In the meantime, please remember our [Core Values](#) and be good to each other.

love and banana suits,

faith